

Audience: General population

CDC: 2011-2012 Flu Season

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It's not too late to vaccinate – Get your flu vaccine today!

When you see “Get Your Flu Vaccine Here” signs and banners after November outside pharmacies and in doctor's offices, you might think, “isn't it too late for that?”

The answer is “no!”

“Flu season typically peaks in January or February and can last as late as May,” says Dr. Anne Schuchat, Assistant Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service and Director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “We are encouraging people who have not yet been vaccinated to get vaccinated now.”

For millions of people each year, the flu can bring a fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle aches, fatigue, and miserable days spent in bed instead of at work or school. However, you may not realize that more than 200,000 people are hospitalized in the United States from flu complications each year. The flu also can be deadly. Between 1976 and 2007, CDC estimates that annual flu-associated deaths in the United States ranged from a low of about 3,000 people to a high of about 49,000 people.

An annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months and older. It's available in two forms: shots and a nasal spray. The flu shot options include the regular flu shot, the new intradermal flu shot, and a high-dose flu shot. While the regular flu shot can be given to just about everyone, the intradermal flu shot is approved for use in adults 18 through 64 years of age, and the high-dose flu shot is for people aged 65 years and older. The nasal spray vaccine is approved only for use in healthy people ages 2 to 49 years who aren't pregnant.

Anyone can get the flu, but some people are at greater risk for serious flu-related complications, like pneumonia, that can lead to hospitalization and even death. For those at greater risk for complications, getting the flu vaccine is especially important. People at greater risk include:

- Children younger than 5 years old, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- Pregnant women
- People with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes (type 1 and 2), or heart and lung disease
- People 65 years and older

It's also important to get the vaccine if you care for anyone in one or more of these high risk groups, or for babies younger than 6 months because they are too young to get the vaccine.

Children 6 months through 8 years of age getting vaccinated for the first time need two doses of flu vaccine to be fully protected. If a child has not received his/her first dose, get them vaccinated now. For children who are 6 months through 8 years of age and have been vaccinated with one dose, parents should check with the child's doctor to see if a second dose is needed.

"Getting the flu vaccine is simple, and it's the most important thing you can do to protect yourself and your family from the flu," says Dr. Schuchat.

Flu vaccines are offered in many locations, including doctor's offices, clinics, health departments, pharmacies and college health centers. They also are offered by many employers, and are even available in some schools. So next time you see a sign that says, "Get Your Flu Vaccine Here," stop in. Or, make an appointment with your doctor or clinic today. Visit www.flu.gov and use the Flu Vaccine Finder to find the nearest location where you and your family can get vaccinated.

For more information about influenza or the flu vaccine, talk to your doctor or nurse, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, <http://www.flu.gov> or call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO.

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